

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00
PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 SP-02 /030 W
-----310141Z 073137 /54
P 310122Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2983
INFO AMCONSUL MONTREAL
ALL OTHER AMCONSULS CANADA POUCH

C O N F I D E N T I A L OTTAWA 02176

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, CA
SUBJECT: JOE CLARK BECOMES MORE SPECIFIC ON QUEBEC -
SOMEWHAT

REF: A) QUEBEC 134; B) OTTAWA 2009

1. ONE MAJOR REASON FOR PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE (PC)
LEADER JOE CLARK'S DECLINE IN VOTER POPULARITY VIS A VIS
PM TRUDEAU HAS BEEN ELECTORATE'S PERCEPTION HE HAS NOT
SPOKEN OUT IN DETAIL ON ISSUES (REF B). THIS HAS BEEN
PARTICULARLY TRUE REGARDING QUEBEC ISSUE IN WHICH TRUDEAU
HAS PREEMPTED FEDERALIST FIELD.

2. THERE IS SOME RECENT EVIDENCE CLARK INTENDS TO REPAIR
HIS IMAGE WITH MORE SPECIFICITY ON QUEBEC/NATIONAL UNITY
QUESTION. IN HIS MARCH 23 SPEECH IN QUEBEC RIDING OF
LOUIS HEBERT (REF A), CLARK CITED SPECIFIC AREAS IN WHICH
FEDERAL POWERS SHOULD BE CURTAILED AND PROVINCIAL JURIS-
DICTION AND/OR POWER EXTENDED. THESE INCLUDED URBAN
AFFAIRS, CULTURAL AFFAIRS, INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT, COMMUN-
ICATIONS, IMMIGRATION, AND OFF-SHORE MINERAL RESOURCES.
CLARK DID NOT DESCRIBE THIS AS DECENTRALIZATION, BUT
RATHER AS "FLEXIBILITY". FYI. HE TOLD AMBASSADOR MONTH
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AGO THAT PCS WOULD AVOID USE OF FORMER AND STRESS LATTER.
THIS MAY BE LARGELY SEMANTICS, BUT "FLEXIBILITY" DOES
SMACK LESS OF UNILATERAL TRANSFER OF POWER AND SUGGESTS
SPECIAL SOLUTIONS TO SPECIAL PROBLEMS. IN ANY CASE,
DECENTRALIZATION IS GONE FROM PC VOCABULARY. END FYI.

3. BY ISOLATING THESE AREAS FOR DEVOLUTION OF POWER,

CLARK HAS GONE FURTHER THAN HERETOFORE ON QUEBEC ISSUE, CAUSING SOME OBSERVERS TO HAIL SPEECH AS "A NEW CONSTITUTIONAL POLICY" (REF A) AND SYNDICATED COLUMNIST CHARLES LYNCH TO DESCRIBE IT AS "SOUNDING A NOTE OF HIGH HOPE AT A TIME WHEN SUCH NOTES ARE FEW." IN FACT, IT WAS CONSIDERABLY LESS THAN THAT. EVEN WITH TWO TOPICS ON WHICH HE CONCENTRATED ATTENTION (INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURE), CLARK SPOKE ONLY IN GENERALITIES WITH RESPECT TO IMPLEMENTATION. HE SAID: "HERE ARE TWO SECTORS WHERE MAJOR CHANGES COULD BE UNDERTAKEN BY WAY OF ADMINISTRATIVE AGREEMENTS BETWEEN TWO LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT. SUCH CHANGES DO NOT PRECLUDE THE POSSIBILITY OF AN EXHAUSTIVE CONSTITUTIONAL REVISION, BUT HAVE THE UNDOUBTED ADVANTAGE OF BEING ABLE TO BE IMPLEMENTED RELATIVELY QUICKLY." WITH OTHER CATEGORIES, HE WAS EVEN MORE VAGUE.

4. COMMENT: THOUGH SPEECH FELL WELL SHORT OF HYPERBOLIC ACCLAMATIONS OF SOME OBSERVERS, WHO SEEMED TO HEAR WHAT THEY WANTED TO HEAR, IT WAS MAJOR STEP FORWARD FOR CLARK IN ADVANCING AN ALTERNATIVE TO TRUDEAU GOVERNMENT POLICY. CLARK IS CAUTIOUS POLITICIAN AND "SOUNDING A NOTE OF HIGH HOPE" IS NOT HIS STYLE. BUT IT DOES LOOK LIKE HE MAY BE MOVING, ALBEIT TENTATIVELY, TOWARDS "A NEW CONSTITUTIONAL POLICY" AND REFURBISHING HIS IMAGE IN THE PROCESS.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PERSONAL OPINION, ELECTION CANDIDATES, POLITICAL SITUATION, NATIONAL ELECTIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 31-Mar-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977OTTAWA02176
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770109-0807
Format: TEL
From: OTTAWA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t1977033/aaaaabwy.tel
Line Count: 87
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: ea5f20b3-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 QUEBEC 134, 77 OTTAWA 2009
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 21-Dec-2004 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3018222
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: JOE CLARK BECOMES MORE SPECIFIC ON QUEBEC - SOMEWHAT
TAGS: PINT, CA, PC, (CLARK, JOE)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/ea5f20b3-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009